



Written Testimony Submitted by  
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to the  
Committee on Program Review and Investigations  
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Members of the Committee on Program Review and Investigations, I regret that due to other commitments, I am unable to appear before you today. I do, however, wish to submit comments for your consideration on Senate Bill 1026, *An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee Concerning a Public Agenda for Higher Education*.

Here is the short answer: we agree. There ought to be an overarching higher education agenda for the State of Connecticut. Many of you in the legislature have been saying that for some time, and we agree.

At the Connecticut State University System (CSUS), we are quite proud of the progress we have made, and the work we have done to expand student success. Our graduation rates and retention rates are up, and the number of degrees we award each year has now reached an all-time record level. We have more students than at any time in the past two decades, and more full-time students than ever. The number of students transferring from community colleges continues to grow, and we are even attracting students who have left the state to come back and finish at our universities. Our workforce connections are stronger than ever, as evidenced by the dramatic growth in the number of science majors, engineering students and nursing graduates we are producing, just to name a few. We have made strides to reduce the achievement gap; we have reached out effectively to high schools and middle schools to improve college readiness, and into our communities to connect our students to businesses and community based organizations. But there is still room to do more. We acknowledge that, and we are committed to doing so.

We also recognize that we are not an island. None of the constituent units are. If Connecticut is to truly do its best for our young people, all of higher education needs to be moving in the same direction. That is not to say that we need to *be* the same in order to move in the same direction. We can move down different roads, and reach the same destination.

Developing a publicly accepted overarching agenda, including a broad vision, goals to achieve that vision, strategies to meet those goals and measures of performance – all are good ideas, as is following through with adequate funding to ensure that, collectively, we are able to do what we set out to do.

There is not one absolute guaranteed way to assure that an effective, efficient and comprehensive strategy for higher education is established. Different states pursue this objective in different ways, and as we have seen in recent weeks, there are different proposals now being considered here as well.

But the bottom line is this. We all share a common goal – to do what is best for our students and our state – and we would like to help you achieve that objective. We are ready, willing and able to be a thought partner in this endeavor, to be at the table to work constructively with you and other key stakeholders to sift through the various good ideas to develop the best process for Connecticut.

We are committed to a plan that will meet all of Connecticut's needs, and an effective structure that aligns with the state's higher education priorities – a data-informed effort to address state challenges and prepare our students to thrive, and help our state thrive, for years to come.

The proposed legislation provides for the engagement of all of the constituent units of higher education during the process, including the solicitation of feedback on two of the required reports to be produced by the group. Higher education, like any other discipline, contains certain aspects which must be considered in order to craft a realistic, actionable agenda. Therefore, we believe that such a group would be best served, and the resulting reports and recommendations more complete, if the membership included representatives who have direct experience and background in higher education administration. We therefore would urge you to specify that at least a portion of the membership of the leadership group include representation from higher education.

One of the deliverables of the leadership group would be to “develop a report with recommendations ... including the development of a finance model for the allocation of state appropriations to the constituent units that includes both a base amount of funding and the use of performance-based incentive funding for at least a portion of such allocation.”

Again, we agree. CSUS believes that the suggestion to revise the state funding formula to include an element of incentive funding to ensure that goals are being met could bring benefits. We note that recently the Chancellor of the State University of New York proposed a similar reform for New York State. It is a timely and effective suggestion for improvement, but must be undertaken with care, and with a thorough understanding of higher education and the distinctions inherent in the constituent units in Connecticut.

The proposed legislation also would require that the constituent units “...annually report to the legislature and the public in a clear, concise and thorough manner regarding each constituent unit's expenditures, staffing and state support, including the state appropriation, personnel expenses, personnel fringe benefits, capital improvement bonds and state financial aid to students.” We also agree with this recommendation, and urge the Committee to include the development of a uniform template for this report that is clear and concise, so that the reports will be easily understandable.

I would personally like to thank the committee for your leadership in this effort, and the committee staff for their diligence. We have been working very closely with the staff for many months, and we have been happy to do so. As you may be aware, there were a relatively small number of concerns regarding specific elements of the staff report that we brought to their attention, and it is unfortunate that we were provided an opportunity to do so only after the report was distributed to members and published on the web. However, we believe that the bill before you, with the suggestions we have outlined here, would be a step forward for Connecticut, and for higher education,

Certainly, you have a considerable agenda in the weeks ahead as you grapple not only with the budget and its implications, but the varying suggestions of how best to advance education in our state, from pre-kindergarten through college. We look forward to working with you.

Please contact Jill E. Ferraiolo, Associate Vice Chancellor for Government Relations/Communications, if you require any additional information or have any questions regarding this matter.